

Genealogical sources Archives of Ontario


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Tracing one's ancestors is a personal search requiring patience and ingenuity, as generally speaking few individuals who helped to make history have had their lives and families well documented. But each person's life is involved with many social structures such as government, church and business, so that there are many places one may look for evidence of an individual's life and activities. The Ontario Archives is one source, but many others must also be explored.

William Ormsby
Archivist of Ontario

Start at Home

Examine your own records. Most people have at least some birth, marriage and death certificates, deeds, wills or other documents which will establish their own family in particular times and places. A family bible, photograph albums, scrapbooks, military papers, letters, school diplomas, degrees, yearbooks or publications are all useful sources. Visit the family plot in the cemetery and record the findings. Then go backwards to your parents and grandparents. Quiz older members of your family, as very often there is one who is keen on family history. Write to distant relatives and compare notes. You may avoid duplication of research. Join the Ontario Genealogical Society or other groups and study their publications. Examine your own bookshelf. Local histories, church, school or society anniversary pamphlets or books with lists of members can be valuable. Be inquisitive. Don't assume anything until you can verify the facts. For instance, because you are Presbyterian doesn't mean that your ancestors were. When you have assembled all your facts fill out a pedigree and ancestry chart and you are ready to approach the original sources found in the Ontario Archives. Remember in conducting your research to take full and accurate references of all documents of use to you.

Census Records

The Archives has microfilm copies of the decennial census for 1851, 1861, 1871, 1881. The originals are in the Public Archives of Canada, Ottawa. These contain the nominal or name returns of households and include such information as age, country of birth, religion and occupation of family members. If there is an agricultural census included, this will show the lot and concession the family lived on.

An aggregate (numbers) census was taken in some areas in 1842 and copies of this are also on microfilm. There is an index, arranged alphabetically by township, to direct you to the appropriate reel of film.

Vital Statistics

These records include church records, cemetery records, marriage records: registers of district and county, Upper Canada marriage bonds, marriage licences, marriage certificates. They deal mainly with the period prior to 1869, when compulsory registration of births, marriages and deaths came into effect. After 1869, information should be found in the Registrar General's Office. The records are mainly on microfilm, but there are some which will be in manuscript form. For each of these three areas, consult the manuscript card index by place.

Land Records

This is probably the largest group of records of interest to the genealogist.

The following is a list of those land records most likely to be of use:

Computerized Land Records Index

There are two alphabetical listings; one by locatee and one by township. They have the initial land grants, pre-patent, and cover a time period ranging from 1780's to the beginning of World War I. There is both a hard copy and a microfiche format.

Index to Land Patents and Patents

The index to patents is on microfilm (Ms.1) and the patents themselves are in R. G. 53. These deal only with the original grant from the Crown. Copies of land patents must be obtained from the Recording Office of the Ministry of Government Services.

Abstract Index to Deeds and Deeds

These are on microfilm only in the Archives' G. S. series, the original documents still being in the possession of the local registry offices in each county. They deal with subsequent transactions on a piece of land once the patent has been granted. Copies of deeds must be requested from the local registry offices and not from the Archives.

Township Papers (R.G.1, CIV)

These form part of the Crown Lands Papers.

Each township is arranged by concessions and lots.

The papers contain such documents as location certificates, location tickets, certificates of settlement duties and some correspondence. Again, they deal only with original locatees. The township papers are arranged alphabetically by township.

Land Petitions

The Upper Canada Land Petitions are on microfilm only, the originals being held by the Public Archives of Canada in Ottawa. There is an alphabetical index available on microfilm which will direct you to the relevant reel of microfilm for a particular petition.

The same index will also direct you to the Land Books on microfilm (Ms. 9). These are the minutes of the Executive Council sitting as a land committee and they contain information concerning petitions.

There is a second series of petitions in the Crown Lands Papers (Ref. R.G.1, C-I-1). These are petitions directed to the Commissioner of Crown Lands and are nearly all dated later than 1827.

Orders-in-Council (R.G.1, C-1-2)

These are also in the Crown Lands Papers. They are arranged alphabetically by name of grantee and there is also a series arranged alphabetically by place.

Letters Received, Surveyor General and Commissioner of Lands (R.G.1, A-1-6)

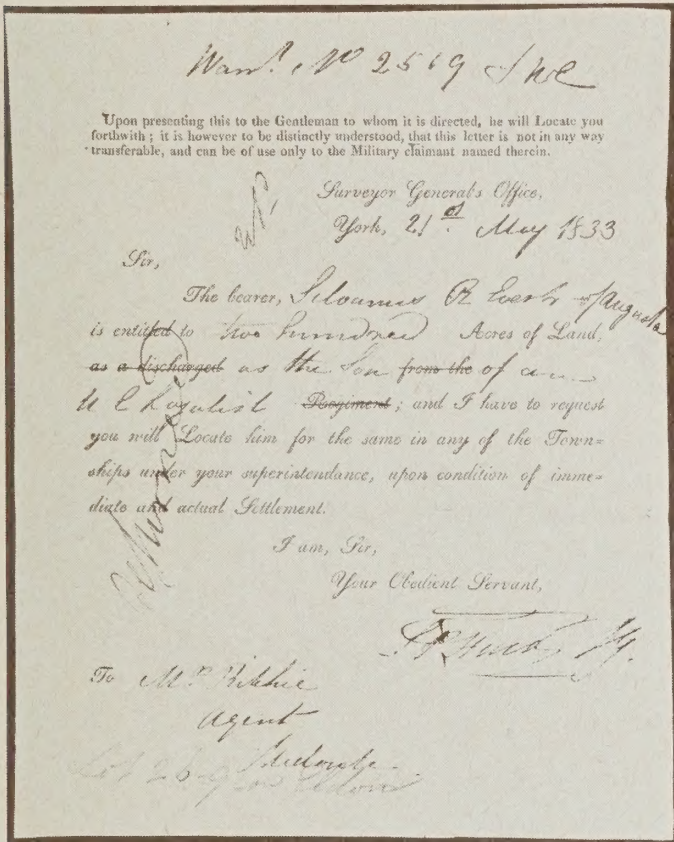
These are also in the Crown Lands Papers and are loose, original letters c. 1786-1905, addressed to either the Surveyor General or the Commissioner. There is a card index up to 1868.

Fiats and Warrants (R.G.1, C-I-3)

These are the documents authorizing the granting of a piece of land. There are several different categories of fiats and warrants for United Empire Loyalists, military claimants, military emigrants, Peter Robinson settlers, etc. depending on the regulations under which they were issued. This series contains registers as well as the actual fiats/warrants. Some of these records are on microfilm.

Locations Registers (R.G.1, C-I-4)

The registers are for Districts and Townships and list the locations for that particular area. The earliest one (Mecklenburg District) is dated c. 1790 and the latest (Renfrew County), 1901.



Military Land Grants 1901-1922 (R.G.1, C-VII)

These deal with land grants to the Fenian Volunteers and South African (Boer) War Volunteers. There are alphabetical indexes to the applications, as well as the land grant files themselves, and registers where the applications are entered by grant number.

For all the records listed in the Crown Lands Papers, (those with the reference R.G.I), there is a detailed finding aid outlining records already cited, plus others which may be of use to individual researchers.

Heir and Devisee Commission (R.G. 40)

These are the records of the second Commission which sat between 1805 and 1911. The records of the first Commission are in the Public Archives of Canada, Ottawa. The Commission sat to review the claims of the heirs, devisees and assignees of the original Crown nominee in order that a patent might be issued for the land in question. There is an





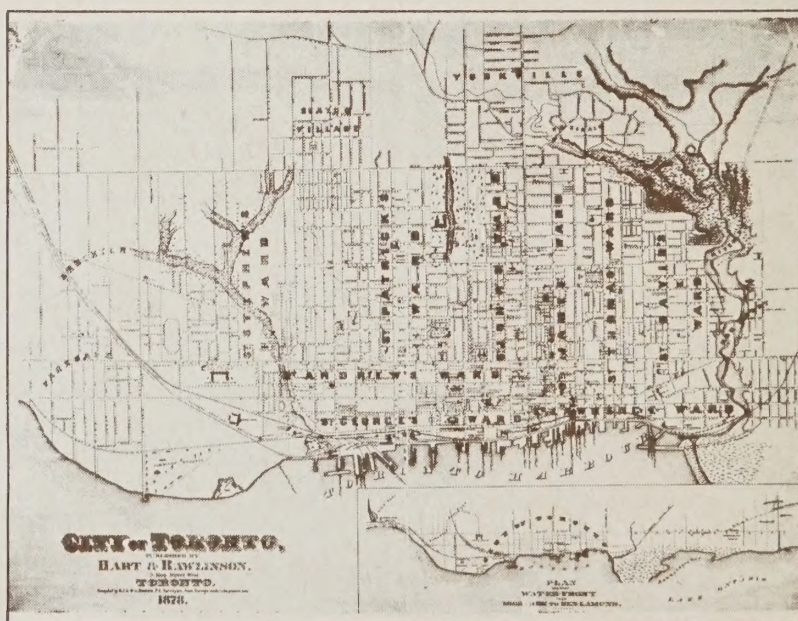
alphabetical index on microfilm (Ms. 174) as well as the original files of each claimant. The index is two-fold, by claimant and by location. The files are arranged chronologically and then alphabetically by claimant within parcels for each year. Therefore, in order to get to a file, the index of claimants' names should be consulted.

Canada Company Papers

The records of the Canada Company are in the Private Manuscripts Section. The records deal with lands in the Huron tract as well as scattered locations throughout southern Ontario. Of special use to the genealogist will be the Registers of Contracts (sales), Registers of Leases, Registers of Lands and Deed Books. There is a finding aid giving more specific details about dates and locations. Some information from this collection has been included in the computerized land records index.

Atlases and Map Collection

There are county atlases c. 1878 available for consultation in the Reading Room. These show settlers in a township at that time, as well as providing a brief synopsis of the early settlement of the area. The Map Collection, located on the 2nd floor, has an extensive collection which includes settlement maps showing lot ownership in townships, county maps and maps by Tremaine, Walling and other cartographers. There is a detailed index to the collection.



Municipal Records

The Archives' holdings of municipal records of southern Ontario are reasonably comprehensive between the years 1850-1900. Earlier records are not so complete. Within this record group (Ref. R.G. 21) the records of most use to the genealogist will be local census records (pre-1851) in nominal (head of household) form for certain areas or aggregate in others, assessment and collection rolls, poll books and voters' lists (in manuscript form). The record group also contains some school census records for certain areas. There is a finding aid outlining the holdings in more detail. Some of the material has been microfilmed and the manuscript card index will direct you to the relevant reels of microfilm.

Court Records (R.G. 22)

Within the Archives' holdings of court records, those of most use to the genealogist will be the wills and estates files.

These fall into 3 main areas:

Records of the Surrogate Clerk

These are of use when the residence of a person at the time of death is unknown. They cover the whole of the Province and date from 1859-1967. There is an index on microfilm (Ms. 404) which will direct you to the relevant application book. The application books are on microfilm up to 1923 (Ms. 404) and after that date the original volume must be consulted. The main information to be obtained from the application book is the date of death and the country where the estate file is located. The estate file includes a will and letters of administration.

Records of the Surrogate Court

A two-level court system with jurisdiction over the estates of deceased persons was established in 1793. The Surrogate Court was responsible for granting probate or letters of administration in the estate of a deceased person whose property was situated in only one district and did not involve large sums of money. After 1858, the Surrogate Court had sole jurisdiction over matters relating to the estates of deceased persons. The Surrogate Court exists in each county and district of the Province and, therefore, the arrangement of the Archives holdings of Surrogate Court records is by county and district. The records of the Surrogate Court are on microfilm up to 1900 and there is a card index arranged alphabetically by county and district to direct you to the relevant reels of film. The Archives also holds original estate files for the years 1900 – 1938. In the case of these files, researchers must supply relevant information to the archivist in charge and expect retrieval delays of up to one week, due to off-site storage of the records. In the case of files for the last forty years, researchers must contact the local Surrogate Court office. When using these records, researchers should first consult the index on microfilm in order to obtain a grant number or register number.

Probate Court Records

This court was also established in 1793 and was to grant probate or letters of administration in the estate of a deceased person who left a personal estate of five pounds or more in value in two or more districts. It was abolished in 1858. The original records of the court are in R.G. 22, 6-1, and an alphabetical inventory of files is available in the Reading Room.

Researchers will also wish to note that occasionally a will was filed with land deeds when it concerned the transfer of land. If no will can be found in the Surrogate Court records, check the Abstract Index to Deeds.

Genealogical Collections in the Private Manuscripts Section

There are several collections in the Private Manuscripts Section which contain useful genealogical information. The main ones falling into this category are:

Perkins Bull Collection

This collection contains genealogical information and family histories, with special emphasis on the Peel County region. It is an extensive collection which is mainly on microfilm. The finding aid will give details concerning the wide variety of subjects in the collection.

Genealogies Collection

As the title implies, this is a collection of various genealogies collected by and donated to the Archives. The manuscript card index will give details of the family names in this collection.

High Treason Register

This is a list of those charged with treason during the War of 1812. It was compiled in the 1920's from material held both here and in the Public Archives of Canada, and contains such information as regiment and the land holdings, if any, of the person charged.

Fr. Ewan Macdonald Papers

This collection contains genealogical charts and worksheets on various Glengarry County families.

F. D. McLennan Collection

This collection contains data on families in Glengarry County.

Peter Robinson Papers

This collection contains specific information on the 1826 Irish immigration to the Peterborough region led by Peter Robinson, and includes passenger lists.

Education Records (R.G.2)

Records of interest to the genealogist in this record group include such items as the Trustees half-yearly returns and annual reports for Grammar Schools, 1854-71. These contain attendance lists. There are also Local Superintendents' Reports, 1850-70, containing teacher's names, and the High School Inspector's Annual Reports, 1872-1932, which contain information about teachers. The finding aid will give details about these and other records in this Record Group.

Immigration Records (R.G.11)

These records date only from 1867 – 1902. Earlier records are in the Public Archives of Canada in Ottawa. Information to be found here includes letter books and registers, destination registers, 1872-74, and passenger warrants, 1872-1888. The finding aid will give further details of the holdings.

Newspaper Collection

The Archives of Ontario has an extensive collection of Ontario newspapers, the majority of which are pre-1930. These are of use to the genealogist for vital statistical information such as obituary notices. Many of the papers have been microfilmed, but a few are still in original form. There is a finding aid, arranged alphabetically by place of publication, as well as a card index, arranged the same way, for microfilmed papers.

Secondary Sources Available in the Archives of Ontario

The Archives' library has a large collection of published materials of use to the genealogist. This includes local histories, county and city directories, published voters' lists, journals of historical societies, and genealogical publications. Some of the material has been microfilmed and the library card catalogue should be consulted for exact details on what is available and its format.

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Page 5: Document. R. G. 1, C-IV, Eldon Township Papers.

Page 8: Map. City of Toronto, 1878.

H. J. and W. A. Browne. Map Collection, D-11.



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